

GRAY SNOW

(Continued from page 8.)

When Preston explained the mission to the crew and asked for volunteers, every man in the crowd responded. The lieutenant picked five men. Equipped with a megaphone, a boat compass, three lanterns and a long rope, the party started.

Meanwhile the church bell had stopped ringing. As they hastened up the wharf, a little string of refugees, headed by Father Kashiveroff, brushed by them in the gloom.

Leaving the wharf, the rescue party proceeded westward along the narrow, winding street until they reached the sloping beach. Consulting the compass by aid of a lantern, the lieutenant led the way; the others followed, clinging to the rope. In that gloom it would never do for a man to become separated from his companions.

On level ground the ashes were two feet deep. Here and there masses of volcanic debris from the step, rocky hills that sloped down to the shore had piled up like huge gray snowdrifts. The party wallowed onward, keeping as near the water as possible.

Occasionally they stumbled over an old log or the rib of a whale. It was hard to breathe, and, except in the little circle of light shed by the lanterns, impossible to see. Once an avalanche of ashes rushing down to the beach cut the party in two, and almost buried a seaman; but the others extricated him, and the procession crawled slowly on. It took almost an hour to make that half mile. At last Preston came plump against a board wall.

"Here's the cannery!" he exclaimed.

Very cautiously they picked their way out upon the wharf. At its end they halted, and Preston shouted through the megaphone:

"On board the schooner!"

A joyful hail came ringing back.

"Lower your boats and come ashore!" ordered the lieutenant.

The party went down on the beach and repeatedly shouted to direct the men from the Hakodate Maru. The shouts in reply grew louder, and presently two boats, each containing fifteen Japanese under the charge of two Americans, came surging through the ashes and grounded on the beach.

Lieutenant Preston quickly made arrangements for the return trip. He placed three of his men ahead, interspersed the other Americans among the Japanese, and himself took the rear—the post of danger.

Before Second Lieutenant Brigham stepped forward to take his place in the line, he lifted his lantern and called Preston's attention to one of the poachers, who was grasping the rope just ahead of the lieutenant. He was a small man, with an ugly bruise as large as a pigeon's egg on his left temple.

"Drew a knife on the gunner and got a state of Pease's fist! He's a bad one. Look out for him!"

The warning was hardly necessary, however. The Japanese, like all the others, was only too glad to get hold of the rope. There was no danger of his making trouble or trying to run away. In fact, it would have been hard work to drive any of them off. They feared the volcanic storm much more than they did their captors. Before the line started, Preston walked with his lantern to its head, to make sure that everyone had hold.

"Keep close to the water," he directed the leader. "Go as fast as you can, but don't lose your way."

Snakily the strange, solemn procession filed past him. The feeble lantern glow emphasized the murkiness of the thick-falling ashes. Man after man came blinking into the narrow circle of light and disappeared beyond.

Preston counted them, one by one. The thirtieth was the Japanese with the bruise on his

temple. He completed the list. Swinging his lantern on his arm, the lieutenant grasped the end of the rope.

Slowly the long line moved along. Although they were retracing the route that the rescue party had just traversed, the footprints had already disappeared under the gray snow. Blindly, choking, almost suffocated, the men stumbled silently on, with their heads down, shielding their eyes and noses as best they could.

Preston realized that it would never do for him to let go. If he dropped off, the poacher in front would pay no attention, indeed, might never notice that he was gone.

Suddenly the blast of a whistle roared through the gloom ahead:

Whoo! Whoo-oo-oo! Whoo-oo-oo!

The Walrus was signaling to guide them, blowing her call letter, W, one short and two long whistles. It put fresh heart into the groping, staggering line. Their pace quickened. Louder and louder roared the steam blast, setting the thick air vibrating.

Whoo! Whoo-oo-oo! Whoo-oo-oo!

The beach narrowed, and Preston knew that the village was only a few hundred feet ahead. They had reached the most dangerous part of their journey, where the path ran under a steeply sloping cliff, which threatened unseen avalanches. The men in the van realized the peril and quickened their pace.

Suddenly there came a rushing overhead. It swelled in volume, and a cry of warning ran along the line:

"Look out! Here it comes!"

The rope twitched forward. Its unexpected jerk upset the poacher in front of Preston and he stumbled and fell. Stopping quickly, the lieutenant locked his arms round the prostrate man to life him to his feet.

At that very moment down from the slippery ledges swooped a great mass of dust and ashes. It swept over the heads of Preston and the Japanese. They were overwhelmed, buried. The lieutenant was held as in a mould. At first he feared that he was fixed inextricably, and a shudder ran over him at the thought of dying with those close, warm ashes filling eyes and ears and nose, and pressing against every square inch of his body.

Nerved to desperation, he began to struggle furiously to work his body clear. He dared not breathe—for to inhale that terrible dust would seal his fate. He had only a few seconds. The thought set him wild, and he fought madly, while little, bright, sharp sparks of flame danced before his eyes.

His strength was ebbing fast, and he knew that he could not hold his breath ten seconds more. Suddenly his arms came free and his head emerged. He shook himself clear and stood up. It was black as pitch. The rope had been pulled away from him. Where was the Japanese?

Something heaved feebly under the ashes at his knees. Although it might cost him his own life, Preston could not desert the helpless poacher.

Gasping and almost exhausted, he dug the man out at last. Although the fellow breathed spasmodically, he was insensible. Preston shouldered his body and, guiding himself by keeping his feet in the water, staggered on.

A faint glimmer broke the gloom.

"Preston! Preston!" called Brigham's anxious voice, and a moment later the second lieutenant came up.

The two officers took turns at carrying the Japanese, and before long the entire party were safe on board the cutter.

Five minutes later, with two lookouts on the fore-castle, the Walrus was feeling her way out slowly through the narrow channel. At last she gained the outer harbor, and felt through the thinning ashes the swell of the open sea.

Gradually, as they steamed south, the gray snow decreased, the skies assumed a reddish col-

or, and objects aboard became dimly visible. The eruption was evidently nearing its close.

The Walrus anchored that night in a sheltered harbor. By morning all precipitation of ashes had ceased, and Captain Edwards steamed back to St. Andrew, landed his human cargo, and sent his sailors ashore to help clear the town of volcanic debris.—From the Youth's Companion.

June Mathis, the little Lake actress, provided the scenario for "God's Half Acre," which was shown at the Broadway during the week.

Miss Denise Karriek has announced the re-opening of her classes in dancing at the B'Nai Brith hall.

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